

# Conservative Ideology, Progressive Design

## Planning SAFFA 1958<sup>1</sup>

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*Katia Frey, Eliana Perotti*

SAFFA 1958 is the acronym for the *Schweizerische Ausstellung für Frauenarbeit* (Exhibition of Swiss Women's Work), that was held from July 17th to September 15th, 1958 in Zürich. The SAFFA's displays explored the lives and activities of Swiss women, and its pavilions, gardens and landscaping presented an impressive showcase of contemporary design by female professionals in Switzerland.<sup>2</sup> Because the exhibition was to have significance for all of Switzerland, the organizers selected the Landiwiese, the site of the 1939 *Landesausstellung* (national exhibition or *Landi* 39), along the western shore of Lake Zürich. In addition to the Landiwiese, the SAFFA 1958 occupied the nearby Schneeligut Park and the shoreline along the Mythenquai. The total area occupied a vast, ca 100,000 square meter site. (Figure 1)

The publicity surrounding the exhibition was impressive. A variety of women's associations, in addition to the voluntary assistance of women from all over the nation and official support on many levels (municipalities, cantons, confederation and many sectors of public services), contributed to the propaganda about and the marketing of the event, achieving a high degree of visibility. There was a SAFFA 1958 stamp, a SAFFA 1958 stamp page, SAFFA 1958 pins, SAFFA 1958 bowls and all sorts of gadgets. All were

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<sup>1</sup> The first research work on SAFFA 1958, conducted by the research group dedra (<http://www.dedra.ch>, accessed on March 2, 2021), resulted in a small exhibition in 2018 at the *Museum für Gestaltung* in Zürich. Since January 2020, the project is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and located at the Zürich University of Applied Sciences. The research team, under the direction of Eliana Perotti, comprises the dedra group members, a doctoral researcher and associated experts (<http://www.saffa1958-snf.ch>, accessed on March 2, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Saffa 1958 (1958a), 2.

adorned with a logo representing the symbol of women—a bold, abstract motif designed by the graphic artist Heidi Soland, who had won a competition for the image.<sup>3</sup> Like the national exhibition in 1939, the organizers constructed and operated a temporary cable car, and there were several boat lines from different parts of the city in addition to a direct bus from the main train station to the site. Once inside, a railway transported visitors around the grounds. A major adjacent thoroughfare was closed to traffic during the exhibition time to avoid congestion and regulate the access to the exhibition.

On the one hand, the *SAFFA 1958* was arranged in thematic sections which explored the domestic and professional activities of women. These reflected the conservative, three-phase model promoted by the organizers as the ideal trajectory for a woman's life: education and professional activity before marriage; motherhood; and an eventual return to the labour market.<sup>4</sup> Several sections, "Housing," "Fashion," "Education," and "Nutrition" were concerned with domestic life. Others, such as "Women at the Service of Community," "Women and Money" and "Recreation and Recollection," dealt with women's activities outside the family. Women's professional activities were summed up in the section "[In] Praise of Work."<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, beyond this restrictive and antiquated framing, the professional Swiss women who designed and realized the event created highly sophisticated modern exhibition architecture. In doing so, they imparted a progressive, emancipated and technically refined image of *SAFFA 1958*—and, by extension, of contemporary Swiss women—to the nation. Although this impression was profoundly misleading, it silenced sceptics and detractors who had bet against the success of a women's fair since the beginning of the venture.

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3 Cf. „Was bedeutet das SAFFA-Zeichen?“ (1958).

4 Cf. Joris (2018), 95–106, especially 95.

5 Cf. *Saffa 1958* (1958b).



Figure 1: Aerial view, SAFFA 1958 on the Landiwiese along Lake Zürich, showing the pavilions, the SAFFA Tower and the SAFFA Island. Source: ETH-BIB-Zürich, Saffa-LBS\_H1-021321.tif (Open access).



Figure 2: Women architects visiting the SAFFA Tower construction site, 1958. Source: Bequest Annemarie und Hans Hubacher (gta Archives, ETH Zürich).

## "The world as a living room"

Largely due to the contributions of women during wartime, between 1918 and 1945, the majority of European countries had granted women suffrage. Switzerland was not among them and became one of the last European nations to give women the vote in 1971. The fact that Switzerland had not been involved in armed conflict during the Second World War had a substantial impact on the division of labour in Swiss society. In contrast to other European countries, the employment of women declined while the number of births rose during the war years. The only new jobs emerging for women were a consequence of the innovative measures introduced by industrial manufacturing.

After the Second World War, organisations such as Pro Familia and the Union of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps propagated a feminine ideal that reinforced traditional gender hierarchy. In 1945, a constitutional amendment on family policy further strengthened this lopsided dualism,<sup>6</sup> affirming as normative the model of a male breadwinner and an unemployed female, that is, an economic appendage of the husband, and blatantly discriminating against unmarried women. Regulations governing retirement and pensions that were supported not only by conservative politicians but also by the trade unions bolstered this paradigm.

A kind of anthropological argument was constructed to insert women into the labor market and to conform to the prevailing social premises and political arrangements. Within this narrow framework, contemporaneous discourses confined women's contributions to the world of remunerative work to auxiliary, caring and nurturing activities.<sup>7</sup>

SAFFA 1958 was a product of the conservative ideological context of the 1950s. Originally, the *Bund Schweizerischer Frauenvereine* (Union of Swiss Women's Associations or BSF) intended to organize an exhibition about housing. During the planning, they decided to extend the concept to present a more comprehensive exhibition that would include displays not only about the home and domestic activities, but also those illustrating the professional accomplishments of women in public life. This enlargement of the female sphere reflected the middle-class women's movement idea of "the world as a living room," where women were assigned the reciprocal duties of

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Joris (2011), especially 247, 250; Mesmer (2007), 292–298.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Lustig (1958); Morell-Vögtli (1958); Oettli (1958).

caring, nursing and community building in private and in the world at large to render both more humane and accommodating.<sup>8</sup> The BSF invited all Swiss women's organizations to participate in the exhibition, excluding only the Communist League due to ideological incompatibility. During the preparations, however, the middle-class women's fraction of the BSF, comprised of the Swiss League of Catholic Women, the Swiss Federation of Protestant Women and the Swiss Women's Charitable Association, took charge and subsequently directed the enterprise.<sup>9</sup>

## Displaying women's work and creative endeavors

SAFFA 1958 was in fact one of the few opportunities for Swiss women to collectively present their skills and abilities to the public sphere. The first such display was the 1909 *Schweizerische Heimarbeitausstellung* (Swiss Exhibition of Cottage Industries), held in Zürich and Basel. It was inspired by a similar presentation in Berlin<sup>10</sup> three years earlier that was also devoted to the conditions of home-based production. In 1953, to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the canton joining the Swiss Confederation, the women's organisations of the Canton Sankt Gallen initiated an extensive exhibition at the city museum. Entitled *150 Jahre Frauenarbeit im Kanton St. Gallen* (150 Years Women's Work in the Canton St. Gallen), it drew attention to women's achievements in the professional and private sectors, that is, as housewives, farmers, teachers, artists, graduates of universities, industrial workers and members of women's associations.<sup>11</sup>

In 1928, the first SAFFA, which took place in Bern, the Swiss capital, had been a pioneering event and, until 1958, served as the highpoint of the display of women's work and culture in this nation. For the 1928 exhibition,

<sup>8</sup> The full motto concluded with an appeal to women: "Let's help to make it more homelike." Cf. Krähenbühl (1991); Die Linie. Bilder und Texte der „Linien“ an der Saffa 1958 (1958); Cf. also Joris/Witzig (eds.) (1986), 167–273.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Krähenbühl (2000), 203–205.

<sup>10</sup> The Berlin exhibition was entitled: *Deutsche Heimarbeit-Ausstellung 1906*.

<sup>11</sup> Cf., Heiss/Koppel (eds.) (1906); Lorenz (1909); „Von der Heimarbeit-Ausstellung in Zürich“ (1909); Ausstellung 150 Jahre Frauenarbeit im Kanton St. Gallen, Abteilung Kunst/Kunsthandwerk. Katalog (1953); Archiv für Frauen-, Geschlechter- und Sozialgeschichte Ostschweiz (ed.) (2010).

women architects and designers erected boldly articulated pavilions on the national fairgrounds. The exhibits drew attention to the professional work and skilled labor performed by women, and the endeavour was a great popular and financial success. Although it advocated for cottage industries as appropriate remunerated activities for women, due to commercial interests, presentations also addressed women as consumers. The presence of such gender-directed advertising there served as the main argument for allowing for similar sponsorship at SAFFA 1958.<sup>12</sup>

The organizers of SAFFA 1928 intended to make men aware of the scope of feminine talents and abilities; their ultimate goal was to gain suffrage and equal rights for women. Considering the restrained calls for emancipation that accompanied the event and the support of it by female activists who were involved in the socialist movement, this proved to be a naïve proposition.

Even the organizers of SAFFA 1928 could not deny the snail's pace with which women's suffrage was pursued in Switzerland, drawing attention to this situation in the inaugural ceremonies.<sup>13</sup> The great success of SAFFA 1928 notwithstanding, for the planning and realization of the *Landi* 39 a decade later, their competence and know-how was apparently not required. The subject of women was relegated to a small pavilion, located apart from the main promenade, with wall paintings on the interior by the Zürich artist Berta Tappolet.<sup>14</sup>

Whereas SAFFA 1928 displayed feminine production in a typical exhibition format,<sup>15</sup> SAFFA 1958 intended to present a more complex and comprehensive review of the everyday lives of women and the kinds of work under-

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Voegeli (1988); Arnold (ed.) (2001), 112.

<sup>13</sup> In 1928, an oversized sculpture of a snail labeled the "Progress of Women's Suffrage in Switzerland" was prominently displayed in the parade for women's suffrage in Bern. At the SAFFA 1958 exhibition, however, this sculpture was not tolerated at the main entrance to the fair and was relegated to the remote edge of the surrounding forest. Cf. Ruckstuhl/Benz-Burger (1986), 31.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Arnold (ed.) (2001), 111.

<sup>15</sup> The professions undertaken by women („Frauenberufe“) on display were divided in 14 categories, including: domestic economy, kitchen and laundry, the life of the countrywomen, traditional costumes, amateur works and education and nursing. There were also sections for fine arts, arts and crafts, as well as science and culture and the work of Swiss women abroad. Cf. Arnold (ed.) (2001), 113.

taken by them. In 1958, statistics showed that approximatively 700,000 Swiss women or 35% of the adult female population were employed outside of the home. Nevertheless, the political and economic forces shaping post-war Europe caused organizers to evoke nationalist sentiments to frame their gendered show of life and work. Taking place at the start of the Cold War and as a period of economic expansion was unfolding, SAFFA 1958 turned to the recent past and referenced the Swiss National Exhibition of 1939. The *Landi 39* was orchestrated during a moment of social and political transition on the eve of the Second World War and had promoted the patriotic position known as *Geistige Landesverteidigung* (national intellectual defence). Nineteen years later, the SAFFA 1958 committee underscored their affinity to common national values of pragmatism and frugality, implying that it was a *Landi* of the Cold War period. Beyond ideology, other similarities—including the exhibition site, the disposition of the buildings and the program—were in evidence. In addition to demonstrating their willingness to be engaged citizens and their commitment to national defence, the women of SAFFA 1958 tried out a strategy to blunt criticism of their demands for equal rights and suffrage by adopting Cold War rhetoric and favouring general declarations with humanist intent over overt statements about women's political issues.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, the Swiss Federal Government only supported SAFFA 1958 with the modest amount of 550,000 Swiss Francs, while delegating the sum of nine million Swiss Francs to the all-male national contribution to the concurrent World Exhibition in Brussels. The remaining funds came from the cantons, local institutions, private industry, individual donations and merchandising. It is therefore all the remarkable that the SAFFA 1958 management closed its books with a net-profit of two million Swiss Francs.<sup>17</sup>

Approximately 500 women were employed in various capacities, such as members of commissions and as remunerated professionals. In this regard, SAFFA 1958 turned out to be a powerful development program, giving many young women, artists, architects, graphic and object designers, writers, journalists and so on their first commissions. (Figure 2) Through documenting their accomplishments and introducing them to the public at large, SAFFA 1958 also succeeded, as no other national event of the post-war era in

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Krähenbühl (2000).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. „SAFFA 1958: Reingewinn von 2 Millionen Schweizerfranken“ (2000), 983–984; Krähenbühl (2000), 207.

Switzerland, in presenting a representative cross section of the artistic and creative work of Swiss women. On display one year before the failed attempt to gain female suffrage, SAFFA 1958 was an event of national importance that hosted nearly two million visitors, or slightly less than forty percent of Switzerland's population at that time.<sup>18</sup>

## Teamwork – A miracle of cooperation and logistics

The great number of women who actively participated in shaping the aesthetic contours of SAFFA 1958—33 architects, 7 interior architects, 2 landscape architects, 38 graphic designers, one engineer, over 30 artists—whose names have mostly been forgotten by Swiss art and architecture history, represent a real challenge for present-day researchers as the documentation of women's intellectual, artistic and technical contributions to the post-war cultural and art history of Switzerland is still in a nascent stage.

The organizers were well aware that the physical realization of the exhibition, notably the quality of the architecture in addition to the materials and the details, would communicate the achievements of women and highlight their professional abilities. Therefore, the choice of the chief architect was decisive. Nonetheless, the person they selected revealed the ambiguous attitude towards female professionalism on the part of the organizing committee.<sup>19</sup> In May 1956, after the committee agreed to the provisory program and drew up a planning chart, they appointed Annemarie Hubacher as the chief architect of SAFFA 1958.<sup>20</sup>

Annemarie Hubacher (1921–2012)<sup>21</sup> represented the perfect choice for the conservative organizers: at that time, she ran an office in Zurich with her husband, Hans Hubacher. As rumours go, this fact was decisive for the organizing committee because it was assumed that if she failed, he could step in to help. Hans Hofmann, the chief architect of the *Landi 1939*, had been con-

<sup>18</sup> Cf. the data on visitors in: SAFFA 1958 (1960), Appendix IX/79.

<sup>19</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the building commission, March 26, 1956. Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv Zürich.

<sup>20</sup> SAFFA 1958 (1960), 3.

<sup>21</sup> On Annemarie Hubacher-Constam cf. Walther (1990), 43–46; Maurer (2000), 7; Schindler (2012); Hubacher (2014) and Perotti (2016).

sulted and he could have suggested Annemarie, who was his former student and wife of his former assistant, Hans. Moreover, she belonged to the local architectural establishment: she was the granddaughter of Gustav Gull, who was city architect of Zürich (1895–1900) and a professor at the ETH (1900–1929), whose public buildings, like the National Museum, prominently figure in the modern-day city. In addition, Annemarie Hubacher had been in practice since 1944 and had successfully planned temporary exhibitions (such as the stands for the Swiss center for commerce at the international fairs in Brussels in 1950 and in Milan in 1951)<sup>22</sup> and popular, celebratory events, like the sexacentennial commemoration of the canton of Zürich joining the Swiss Confederation in 1951, which her husband, acting as chief architect, directed.<sup>23</sup>

In an interview with Mariette Beyeler in 1994, Annemarie Hubacher recalled that in Spring 1956 she had been invited to comment on the master plan for *SAFFA 1958* designed by the Swiss architects Berta Rahm and Lisbeth Sachs the year before.<sup>24</sup> In fact, at the beginning of 1955, when the BSF decided to organize the exhibition, the study commission approached the architects Berta Rahm and Lisbeth Sachs and asked them for a non-binding, schematic proposal for the exhibition.<sup>25</sup>

The nomination of Annemarie Hubacher deeply affected Berta Rahm (1910–1998), who interpreted it as a rejection of unmarried women, like herself, as architects.<sup>26</sup> Berta Rahm, who had studied architecture at the ETH, was a pioneering woman professional and struggled throughout her life for recognition as an architect. Among her innovative interests, she proposed new forms of housing and communal living among individuals based on mutual affection and interests or the desire to economize. She called these people “incomplete families”, meaning those who were widowed, divorced or single parents with children; grandparents with grandchildren; sisters and

22 Cf. „Die Schweizer Abteilung an der Internationalen Messe in Brüssel 1950“ (1951).

23 Roth (1951).

24 Cf. *SAFFA 1958* (1960), 2; Beyeler (1999); Hartmann Schweizer (2020), 180–181.

25 Only the proposal by Lisbeth Sachs is known. For the most part, Berta Rahm's professional papers that record her architectural oeuvre have been lost or were destroyed during her eventful life.

26 On Berta Rahm cf. also Lang Jakob (1999); Lang (1992), 431–471; Köchli (1993).

brothers; or friends and colleagues.<sup>27</sup> An avowed feminist, she was actively involved in women's organizations and in 1963 participated in the founding of the International Union of Women Architects (UIFA) in Paris.<sup>28</sup> Persistent conflicts with municipal building authorities caused her to leave architecture and establish the ALA publishing house in Zurich, focusing on feminist questions and reissuing books by forgotten women writers.<sup>29</sup> In the end, Rahm's participation in SAFFA 1958 was reduced to the design and realization of an annex to the club pavilion by the Italian architect Carlo Pagani.

Lisbeth Sachs (1914-2002) also studied architecture at the ETH and had worked in Stockholm as well as in Helsinki at the office of Alvar and Aino Aalto.<sup>30</sup> Shortly after receiving her diploma in 1939, she won the competition for the *Kurtheater* (health resort theatre) in her hometown, Baden. She completed it after the Second World War, the first building of this typology in post-war Switzerland.<sup>31</sup> Sachs was a successful independent architect and had a strong interest in the arts. She supervised the construction of Le Corbusier's final project, the 1967 house for Heidi Weber in Zürich, was active as an architectural critic and publicist in addition to lecturing at the F+F School for Art and Design in Zürich.<sup>32</sup>

Drawing upon SAFFA 1928, Lisbeth Sachs proposed in her master plan a tower and a suggested that the site be enlarged, ideas that the organisers integrated into the final scheme but without acknowledging her contribution. Eventually, she only received the commission to design and construct the *Kunsthalle* (art pavilion). Even within the limits of an extremely modest budget, Sachs was able to design a striking new building, which harmonized with the overall aesthetic of the exhibition.

The reaction of Berta Rahm to the nomination of Annemarie Hubacher brings up a generational conflict: Rahm, like Sachs, belonged to the older generation of women architects in Switzerland who had to choose between family and career. For this reason, many remained single. Hubacher's

<sup>27</sup> Rahm (1950).

<sup>28</sup> Rahm (1963).

<sup>29</sup> Howald (1990).

<sup>30</sup> On Lisbeth Sachs cf. Maurer (2003); Jakob (1994); Lang (1992), 535–574; Rey/Wanner (1980), 14–17; Hartmann Schweizer (2020).

<sup>31</sup> The building was completed in 1951–52. „Das neue Kurtheater in Baden“ (1952).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Rey/Wanner (1980), 14–17.

younger generation, meanwhile, tried to reconcile these choices: all were married, with one exception, to architects.<sup>33</sup> As perhaps fitting to the exhibition's contradictory message, the organizers, who condemned professional activity for women with families, chose as chief architect a woman who was expecting her third child.

The selection of the supporting architects is also interesting: the building commission recommended that contracts be awarded to a dozen women, mostly from an older generation, who had been considered for the position of chief architect.<sup>34</sup> In addition, Annemarie Hubacher probably lobbied for projects to be given to many younger colleagues. For this up-and-coming generation, participation in SAFFA 1958 was an important opportunity, as it introduced them to a large audience and enabled them to acquire other commissions after the event. Annemarie Hubacher acted as an important intermediary between the organizers and the young architects who did not embrace the "three phase" notion about how women should lead their lives. However, the organizers were well aware that drawing attention to these young, married women who had families yet were able to design and oversee the construction of the exhibition was good publicity; they were independent, liberal, creative, self-assured and—most important of all—none were feminists.<sup>35</sup> According to the organizers, Annemarie Hubacher epitomized the ideal modern woman because she collaborated with men and did not act as their rival.<sup>36</sup>

## Advertising post-war Modernity in Switzerland: International style and technological excellence

In view of the organizers' conservative ideology, their conciliatory strategy, their ambition to emulate the success of SAFFA 1928 and, in particular, their profound fear of economic failure, the realization of the exhibition repre-

33 For a comparison of the architects' biographies, see: Beyeler (1999), 46–47.

34 Cf. Minutes of the meeting the building commission 23.04.1956. Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv Zürich.

35 Cf. B. (1958).

36 Cf. Die Frauen-Landi. Die Gastgeberin Annemarie Hubacher-Constam, dipl. Arch. ETH (1958).

sented an on-going challenge for the chief architect. From the beginning, an economy of means was imperative, and this prerequisite dictated the use of cheap, prefabricated, recycled wooden frames for the structural supports of the temporary structures.<sup>37</sup> Over the course of the planning, several pavilions had to be eliminated for economic reasons because the organizers were more concerned with the budget than with the architectural quality or coherence of the exhibition route. Arguably, their fear of financial deficits implied that they themselves were not convinced that the exhibition would be a success. The chief architect was thus challenged to produce a representative public event with extremely limited resources.<sup>38</sup>

For her part, Annemarie Hubacher desired to create an ensemble that was on par with contemporary international exhibition architecture. Despite budget constraints, she achieved her goal.<sup>39</sup> With the exception of the chapel at the entrance, many of the most important structures that she designed were located in the main part of the fairgrounds on the Landiwiese. This included the tower, the movie theatre, the kiosks, the entry pavilions as well as the administrative and service buildings. Thus, her aesthetic predilections determined the architectural image of the exhibition. Moreover, her favourite part of the scheme, an artificial island, which she had planned from the inception of the event, was intended to remain after the close of the exhibition.<sup>40</sup> If, in the collective memory, the exhibition site is still associated with the *Landi 39*, the island is known today as the *SAFFA-Insel* (SAFFA Island), even though many people are not aware of the origin of its name.

The structural wooden frames that were used throughout the exhibition were known in the German-speaking world as *Bierzelt* (tent for drinking beer) construction, an association that the chief architect consciously wanted to avoid. Instead of arranging the frames to form long, low rectangular halls for drinking beer, she assembled the frames to form round pavilions, which was a new and unconventional application.<sup>41</sup> (Figure 3) The roof surfaces were pitched toward the centre of each pavilion to facilitate drainage and to fur-

<sup>37</sup> Hubacher/Sachs (1958), 352.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Hubacher (1958a).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Beyeler (1999), 86.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Annemarie Hubacher, quoted in Wyss (1958), 245–246.

ther distinguish them from a *Bierzelt*. To achieve unity, the chief architect also selected materials and designed elements that appeared throughout the thematic sections. These consisted of white canvas; rough horizontal timber planks; recycled panes of glass; fiber cement boards and a special panel system made by intertwining the white canvas and highlighting it with a metal stem, which lent the surfaces of the pavilions plasticity and could be enlivened by the play of sunlight.<sup>42</sup> Despite the interventions of many different architects, the use of canvas, a cheap and ordinary material, allowed for a formal unity; in 1964, the Swiss national exhibition in Lausanne subsequently adopted it for their representative architecture.<sup>43</sup>

A tower was already present in the master plan by Lisbeth Sachs and recalled the prominent landmark that stood at the entrance to the first SAFFA in 1928. A contemporaneous reference was the cylindrical, glazed tower that recalled a tubular electric lamp at the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels. Like Hubacher's structure, visitors rode an elevator directly to the topmost level, from which they descended via stairs while inspecting the displays in the floors below.<sup>44</sup> Although the exhibition at the SAFFA 1958 focused on domesticity and modern interior design, the tower served another function. Located on the public space of the *Landi 39*, known as Celebration Square, the tall structure provided a point of orientation that was visible from every part of the site, directing visitors to the center of the fairground. Frequently photographed, it became the symbol of the exhibition, its transparent facade revealing visitors moving downwards during the day and featuring a more suggestive illuminated version at night. Demonstrating her technical know-how and ability to work with extreme economic constraints, Annemarie Hubacher built the 40-meter-tall tower using only four types of steel profiles. These parts were bolted together, since the construction company Zschokke had lent them free of charge under the condition that they could be dismantled and reused.<sup>45</sup>

(Figure 4)

42 Cf. Hubacher/Sachs (1958), 352.

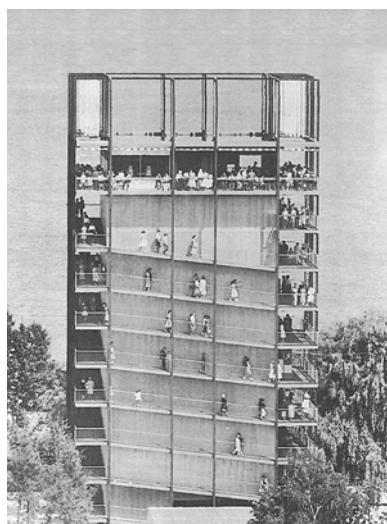
43 Cf. Landesausstellung, under the direction of Camenzind, Alberto (ed.) (1965), 202.

44 Hubacher/Sachs (1958)

45 Ibid.



*Figure 3: Detail, round exhibition halls, SAFFA 1958. Source: Bequest Annemarie und Hans Hubacher (gta Archives, ETH Zürich).*



*Figure 4: Detail, SAFFA Tower, 1958. Source: Neue Schweizerische Illustrierte Zeitung, no. 30, 21.-27.1958 (Open access).*

On the island, Hubacher wanted to build a light, seemingly floating enclosure to shelter the restaurant. She selected a demountable tensile membrane structure developed by the architect and engineer Frei Otto that was first used for the café at the *Interbau 1957* exhibition in West Berlin.<sup>46</sup> It was not only an attractive architectural solution, but also a technical novelty because such a structure had not been previously constructed in Switzerland. At the *Interbau 1957*, Annemarie Hubacher and her assistant Anna Cordes also encountered the technically sophisticated and aesthetically pleasing Mero construction system. It allowed for the easy and quick assembly of tubular steel elements using connective nodes to create wide spans without intermediary vertical supports and was well suited for exhibition architecture.<sup>47</sup>

Elsa Burkhardt-Blum and Jeanne Bueche wished to employ this system for their respective pavilions, the House of the Cantons and the Restaurant Romand, but due to budget limitations they made do partly with the aforementioned wooden frames. In the end, only the chief architect was able to take advantage of the Mero system.<sup>48</sup>

The SAFFA 1958 engaged contemporaneous international architectural discourses in different ways: it presented inventive designs for temporary exhibition pavilions; employed the global language of the International Style; largely avoided national references to local building traditions; and, last but not least, demonstrated an informed and aesthetically refined commitment to advanced construction technology. At the same time, its content and ideology drew upon very conservative and conventional beliefs, a dichotomy that was not unusual for many of the great European exhibitions and fairs of the 1950s and cannot be exclusively reduced to the Swiss situation and the vexing question of women's suffrage there.

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46 Hubacher (1958b), 2–7.

47 Ibid, 2.

48 Ibid.

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